

# Research workshop gets under way at Alliance Francaise



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### IFP's five-day event to see academics examine the interface between heritage, communities and sustainability

Over the next few days, academics will examine the interface between heritage, communities and sustainability, as distinct, yet, overlapping fields of research spanning several disciplines, at a workshop hosted by the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) at Alliance Francaise.

The fifth edition of the IFP's Social Sciences Winter School in Pondicherry (SSWSP) has the participation of over 64 students and a team of multidisciplinary trainers from India, France, United States, Italy and Germany.

French Consul General Catherine Suard inaugurated the five-day workshop, which is spread over plenary sessions and methodological workshops. The plenary session on day one will be followed by methodological workshops on the following days.

Addressing delegates, Frédéric Landy, IFP Director, pointed out that heritage, communities and sustainability, are all linked by a common key word, 'time'. Both directions, towards the past and towards the future, generate the two, sometimes conflicting notions of memory associated to identity, and history, associated to science.

The event has cast as its thematic backdrop rapid global changes and claim for a sustainable future, the emergence of critical heritage studies amid changing relations between societies and their natural environment, and their relation to the fabric of their heritages.

Over the course, the workshop will apply different thematic focus, scales of interpretation, theoretical questioning and methodological frameworks, and an interaction with various stakeholders. These concepts in general suggest a preoccupation with memory, preservation and modes of expression of the people. Interrogating heritage, along with communities, while engaging with visions of sustainability, is a way to explore the possibility of creating 'living' archives.

### **'Living' archives**

According to researchers, "living" archives, material and immaterial, are vectors of knowledge, memories, identities, practices, conveyed through diverse modes of expressions which are grounded in the hierarchies of economic and social life of a people. They are also vectors of power and domination, lending themselves to be appropriated, controlled and render current exercise of hegemony possible.

Among the points of debate are how to refer to archives as 'living' archives constantly evolving and whether the production and use of archives could assist counter-hegemonic practices of the marginalised people? Whether the term is traced back to the ancient Greek arche, "the beginning", the illustrious antiquity, or to the Latin arca, a box for safe-keeping, which preserves and transmits, the notion of archive refers to the journey in space and time of any trace worthy of its name and therefore implicitly refers to dynamics of transfer across ages and cultures.

Researchers point out that archives cannot be reduced to the storage place or to the array of preserved documents.

In various cultural contexts, they take the form of very different technologies and practices and gather various kinds of materials. Seen from such a perspective, archives allow us to "deconstruct" the history and the narratives of our own civilisations.

The workshop will also address the process of rewriting histories of marginalised people by "confronting hegemonic histories" and seeking "critical alternatives in history making projects of the people". Central to the inquiry will be these questions: why construction of histories continues to remain an important exercise for marginalised communities? What are the perspectives, theories, and methods available from attempts to reconstruct such histories? How far su<sup>h</sup><sub>x</sub> histories have helped transform the lives of the marginalised?

The methodological issues in relation to these questions bring together historians, social scientists, writers, community leaders and activists to collectively understand the significance of reconstructing histories in the context of current

social, political and environmental challenges that people face. Another concern that will be discussed is on ensuring the overwhelming presence of tools, techniques and media in circulation today do not subvert the struggle for recognition and dignity.

Fisher labour and life will be scrutinised in a global context of crisis of the conventional food production and processing model, agro-ecology questions the contemporary heritage of peasant knowledge regarding the conservation of local seeds and breeds, and techniques to maintain soil fertility (including micro-hydrology). The workshop will also critique the socio-environmental heritage of agro-ecology and its gender issues.

According to a press note from IFP, the Winter School is a collaborative project of Indo-French cooperation between the Pondicherry University and the IFP. Targeted at master's and early PhD students, the school provides every one the opportunity of knowledge transfer, sharing experiences and research ideas in order to enhance research capacity on a chosen topic.

Anne Casile (French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development, IRD), Nicolas Bautes (IFP), and followed by keynote lectures by distinguished invited scholars such as Benedetta Zaccarello from Centre national de la recherche scientifique--the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), Sukanta Chaudhuri (Jadavpur University), John Kurien (Azim Premji University) and Soma Kishore Parthasarathy (independent researcher).

The workshop collaborators also include the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD) and its research units DIAL (Development, Institutions and Globalisation, Paris) and PALOC (Patrimoines Locaux, Environnement et Globalisation, Paris), and the Centre for South Asian Studies (CEIAS, EHESS-CNRS, Paris) and the CNRS via IFP and its programme, Sustain Asia, and the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), the note said.

By facilitating academic collaboration between experts from multidisciplinary streams, the SSWSP seeks to build up research capacity, strengthen Indo-French cooperation in research in India through the creation of an academic network of researchers in India and France working on South Asia and to consolidate a community of young scholars in India.

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